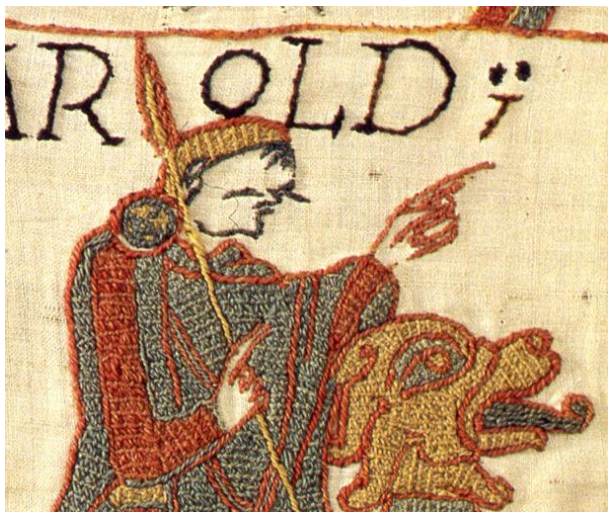




BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE

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The Battle of Stamford Bridge (Old English: Gefeoht æt Stanfōrdbrycg) took place at the village of Stamford Bridge, East Riding of Yorkshire, in England, on 25 September 1066, between an English army under King Harold Godwinson and an invading Norwegian force led by King Harald Hardrada and the English king's brother Tostig Godwinson. After a bloody battle, both Hardrada and Tostig, along with most of the Norwegians, were killed. Although Harold Godwinson repelled the Norwegian invaders, his army was defeated by the Normans at Hastings less than three weeks later. The battle has traditionally been presented as symbolising the end of the Viking Age, although major Scandinavian campaigns in Britain and Ireland occurred in the following decades, such as those of King Sweyn Estrithson of Denmark in 1069–1070 and King Magnus Barefoot of Norway in 1098 and 1102–1103.



Harold Godwinson (c. 1022 – 14 October 1066), also called Harold II, was the last crowned Anglo-Saxon English king. Harold reigned from 6 January 1066 until his death at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, the decisive battle of the Norman Conquest. Harold's death marked the end of Anglo-Saxon rule over England. He was succeeded by William the Conqueror.



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The death of King Edward the Confessor of England in January 1066 had triggered a succession struggle in which a variety of contenders from across north-western Europe fought for the English throne. These claimants included the King of Norway, Harald Hardrada. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Manuscript D, the Norwegians assembled a fleet of 300 ships to invade England. The authors, however, did not seem to differentiate between warships and supply ships. In King Harald's Saga, Snorri Sturluson states, "it is said that King Harald had over two hundred ships, apart from supply ships and smaller craft". Combined with reinforcements picked up in Orkney, the Norwegian army most likely numbered between 7,000 and 9,000 men. Arriving off the English coast in September, Hardrada was joined by further forces recruited in Flanders and Scotland by Tostig Godwinson. Tostig was at odds with his elder brother Harold (who had been elected king by the Witenagemot on the death of Edward). Having been ousted from his position as Earl of Northumbria and exiled in 1065, Tostig had mounted a series of abortive attacks on England in the spring of 1066.



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In the late summer of 1066, the invaders sailed up the Ouse before advancing on York. On 20 September they defeated a northern English army led by Edwin, Earl of Mercia, and his brother Morcar, Earl of Northumbria, at the Battle of Fulford, outside York. Following this victory they received the surrender of York. Having briefly occupied the city and taken hostages and supplies from the city they returned towards their ships at Riccall. They offered peace to the Northumbrians in exchange for their support for Hardrada's bid for the throne, and demanded further hostages from the whole of Yorkshire



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At this time King Harold was in Southern England, anticipating an invasion from France by William, Duke of Normandy, another contender for the English throne. Learning of the Norwegian invasion he headed north at great speed with his housecarls and as many thegns as he could gather, travelling day and night. He made the journey from London to Yorkshire, a distance of about 185 miles (298 km), in only four days, enabling him to take the Norwegians completely by surprise. Having learned that the Northumbrians had been ordered to send the additional hostages and supplies to the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge, Harold hurried on through York to attack them at this rendezvous on 25 September. Until the English army came into view the invaders remained unaware of the presence of a hostile army anywhere in the vicinity.



Edith the Fair , "Edyth the Gentle Swan"; born c. 1025, died c. 1086), also known as Edith Swanneck was one of the wealthiest magnates in England on the eve of the Norman conquest, and may also have been the first wife of King Harold Godwinson

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Ealdgyth (fl. c. 1057–1066), also Aldgyth or Edith in modern English, was a daughter of Ælfgar, Earl of Mercia, the wife of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn (d. 1063), ruler of all Wales, and later the wife and queen consort of Harold Godwinson, king of England in 1066. She was described by William of Jumièges as a considerable beauty.

Ealdgyth later became the wife and queen consort of her late husband's enemy Harold. The date of the marriage is unknown, but it must have taken place at some stage before the Conquest, whether before or after Harold's coronation as king of England (January 1066). It seems that Harold's choice of bride was "aimed not only at securing the support of the Mercian house for himself in his royal ambitions, but also at weakening the links between that same house and the rulers of north Wales". In any event, Ealdgyth was soon to be widowed for a second time. In October that year, Harold was defeated and died in the Battle of Hastings, which was fought against the invading forces of William, Duke of Normandy, who would subsequently ascend the English throne. At the news of Harold's death, Ealdgyth's brothers went to London to fetch her and immediately sent her to Chester for shelter. It is unknown what happened to her thereafter. Harold had a number of children with his common law wife Edith the Fair, but his marriage to Ealdgyth may not have produced any offspring. It has been suggested that Ealdgyth may have been the mother of Harold's son Harold, but this possibility is not universally accepted.

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Manuscripts C, D and E of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle all mention Stamford Bridge by name. Manuscript C contains a passage which states, "Then Harold, king of the English, came upon them beyond the bridge by surprise; and there they joined battle and were fighting very hard long in the day". Though often interpreted to mean the main battle took place east of the Derwent River after the English army had crossed the bridge, Charles Plummer explains that the phrase "beyond the bridge" must be viewed "from the point of view of the enemy. To the English coming from York, they [the Norwegians] would be on the hither [near] side of the bridge". According to Henry of Huntington, after many "fearful assaults on both sides," the English superiority in numbers forced the Norwegians "to give way but not to flee. Driven back beyond the river, the living crossing over the dead, they resisted stoutheartedly". Like the Chronicle account, Henry's description suggests the main battle may have been fought west of the bridge.

The exact location of the battle site is not known for certain. Sources indicate that it took place along the Derwent River, where a wooden bridge crossed the water. There are indications of a meadow on the west side of the river and higher ground on the eastern side. The original bridge no longer exists, and no archaeological traces of it remain. The traditional locating of part of the battle at Battle Flats is based on no contemporary references. Statements that in the 18th-century skeletons and weapons were found there have not been corroborated by modern finds.

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**BATTLE OF STAMFORD
BRIDGE, 1870,
BY PETER NICOLAI ARBO**



According to Snorri Sturluson, before the battle a single man rode up alone to Harald Hardrada and Tostig. He gave no name, but spoke to Tostig, offering the return of his earldom if he would turn against Hardrada. Tostig asked what his brother Harold would be willing to give Hardrada for his trouble. The rider replied "Seven feet of English ground, as he is taller than other men" (implying that both Hardrada and his army would be killed and buried on English soil). Then he rode back to the Saxon host. Hardrada was impressed by the rider's boldness, and asked Tostig who he was. Tostig replied that the rider was Harold Godwinson himself. According to Henry of Huntingdon, Harold said "Six feet of ground or as much more as he needs, as he is taller than most men."

The sudden appearance of the English army caught the Norwegians by surprise. The English advance was then delayed by the need to pass through the choke-point presented by the bridge itself. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon has it that one of the Norwegians (possibly armed with a Dane Axe) blocked the narrow crossing and single-handedly held up the entire English army. The story is that this Viking alone cut down up to 40 Englishmen and was defeated only when an English soldier floated under the bridge and thrust his spear through the planks in the bridge, mortally wounding the warrior. His name was not preserved in the aftermath of this battle.

This delay had allowed the bulk of the Norse army to form a shieldwall to face the English attack. Harold's army poured across the bridge, forming a line just short of the Norse army, locked shields and charged. The battle went far beyond the bridge itself, and although it raged for hours, the Norse army's decision to leave their armour behind left them at a distinct disadvantage. Eventually, the Norse army began to fragment and fracture, allowing the English troops to force their way in and break up the Scandinavians' shield wall. Completely outflanked, and with Hardrada killed with an arrow to his windpipe and Tostig slain, the Norwegian army disintegrated and was virtually annihilated.

In the later stages of the battle, the Norwegians were reinforced by troops who had been guarding the ships at Riccall some 25 km away, led by Eystein Orre, Hardrada's prospective son-in-law. Some of his men were said to have collapsed and died of exhaustion upon reaching the battlefield. The remainder were fully armed for battle. Their counter-attack, described in the Norwegian tradition as "Orre's Storm", briefly checked the English advance, but was soon overwhelmed and Orre was slain. The Norwegian army were routed. As given in the Chronicles, pursued by the English army, some of the fleeing Norsemen drowned whilst crossing rivers.

So many died in an area so small that the field was said to have been still whitened with bleached bones 50 years after the battle.

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Harald Sigurdsson c. 1015 – 25 September 1066), also known as Harald III of Norway and given the epithet Hadrada in the sagas, was King of Norway from 1046 to 1066. He unsuccessfully claimed the Danish throne until 1064 and English throne in 1066. Before becoming king, Harald spent 15 years in exile as a mercenary and military commander in Kievan Rus' and chief of the Varangian Guard in the Byzantine Empire. In his chronicle, Adam of Bremen called him the "Thunderbolt of the North". In 1030 aged fifteen, Harald fought in the Battle of Stiklestad with his half-brother Olaf Haraldsson. Olaf sought to reclaim the Norwegian throne, which he had lost to Danish king Cnut two years prior. Olaf and Harald were defeated by forces loyal to Cnut, and Harald was forced into exile to Kievan Rus'. Thereafter, he was in the army of Grand Prince Yaroslav the Wise, becoming captain, until he moved on to Constantinople with his companions around 1034. In Constantinople, he rose quickly to become the commander of the Byzantine Varangian Guard, seeing action on the Mediterranean Sea, in Asia Minor, Sicily, possibly in the Holy Land, Bulgaria and in Constantinople itself, where he became involved in the imperial dynastic disputes. Harald amassed wealth whilst in the Byzantine Empire, which he shipped to Yaroslav in Kievan Rus' for safekeeping. In 1042, he left the Byzantine Empire, returning to Kievan Rus' to prepare to reclaim the Norwegian throne. In his absence the Norwegian throne had been restored from the Danes to Olaf's illegitimate son Magnus the Good.

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Harald at Stamford Bridge. Matthew Paris may have attributed the axe to Harald due to its general Norse association, or the royal iconography around St. Olaf. According to the sagas, Harald wore a blue tunic and helmet, wielded a sword, and Landøyðan as his royal standard, but not his mail-shirt ("Emma") and shield, which was left at Riccall.

